**How to BLESS the World - Week 1**

**Teaching Team Notes**

**Intro: Slogans**

To get us started today I am going to say a corporate slogan or tagline, and I want you to tell me the name of the company. For example, if I said, “Melts in your mouth, not in your hand” you would say what? That’s right M & M’s. So let’s try a few . . .

**“The quicker picker-upper.”** - Bounty paper towels.

**“America runs on . . .”** (Dunkin’) - Dunkin Donuts

Make less obscure – McDonald’s This one is a little more recent: **“Shave time. Save money.”** - Dollar Shave Club

And maybe the most well-known slogan or tag line ever?

**“Just do it.”** – Company name? Of course, Nike. That tag line has been around since 1988, just one year before we started Community. Not many slogans or taglines last for 30 years.

**Where did hpftwbtG come from?**

We have a slogan here at Community, which is actually our mission statement. And my guess is that the vast majority of the people in this room are familiar with it, but do you know how it came to be our mission statement? Would you like to know? – I’m so glad you asked. ☺

About 18 months into the life of our church, a few of us from our staff went to a conference on leading and developing small groups. It was led by a guy named Lyman Coleman. Lyman was a tall, thin, white-haired guy with black thick-rimmed glasses and sort of disheveled clothes. ~~I remember him saying his nickname in high school was “Slimey” because he was a hurdler, and he would sort of just slime his way over the hurdles.~~ That’s what he said. I always thought of him as a bit of a hippy, but he was super passionate about reaching people who were far from God. And he was convinced that the best way to connect with these people was through small groups where they could experience authentic community and see firsthand the love and grace of Jesus. Truth is ~~“Slimey”~~ has had a significant influence on our church.

As he made a case for starting and leading small groups where people at all places on their spiritual journey would feel welcome, he would retell Jesus’ story of the prodigal son. The story where the son asked his father for his inheritance, then leaves home and squanders it before finally coming to his senses and returning home to his father where he was welcomed with open arms. It was with great conviction, that Lyman then reminded us that we are all prodigals and that there are many prodigals in our communities who have yet to find their way back to the Father.

Listening to Lyman share his passion for prodigals made our hearts beat fast, and we were convinced that we had just found our mission statement: ***“Helping people find their way back to God.***

I don’t know what our mission statement was before that, but I did do a little digging and at some point in those first 18 months, we actually used the phrase “Christianity for Today.” Yikes. Thank God for “helping people find their back to God.”

**It’s One Thing to Know It and Another to Do It**

Now, the interesting thing about a slogan is that you can **know** it, but not really let it impact you. Back to Nike for a minute. While almost everyone **knows** the slogan “Just Do It,” and likes it, truth is many of us wear Nike clothes and “Just *don’t* do it.” In fact, there is a whole new trend in clothing called “Athleisure” clothing, for people who want to **wear** activewear but don’t want to work out! That cracks me up.

(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athleisure>)

But you know, the same is true with hpftwbtG. Knowing the mission is one thing...living it out is another. And I think most of us really do hope that the people we love – our friends, family, and co-workers will find their way back to God, but so many of us still struggle to actually live the mission out. And so I guess the question is Don’t juxtapose this. Instead our mission is not “hoping” it is “helping.” How do we go beyond “hoping.” “How do I stop **hoping** and how do I start **helping**?”

**The Blessing**

Here is some good news. The good news is that you have been blessed with everything you need to carry out God’s mission.

How do we know that? Let’s take a look at what God has to say about it.

**Abraham**

Some people think that God’s mission started when Jesus came to earth, or when he commissioned his closest followers to “Go and make disciples,” but God had a mission for his people back in the very beginning – in Genesis.

Take a look at what God said to Abraham:

***The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.***

***2“I will make you into a great nation,
    and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
    and you will be a blessing.[***[***a***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=genesis+12&version=NIV#fen-NIV-301a)***]
3I will bless those who bless you,
    and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
    will be blessed through you.”[***[***b***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=genesis+12&version=NIV#fen-NIV-302b)***]***

There is one word that is repeated five times in just three short verses. Do you see that word? What’s the word? Yes, it’s the word “bless.” God says to Abraham, “I will bless you . . . and you will **be** a blessing . . . and I will bless those who bless **you** . . . and not only that . . . all people on earth will be blessed through you.” Wow!

At this point, Abraham’s future was very much in doubt. He and Saria did not have a son yet to carry on his legacy. You might say that the mission of men had come to a screeching halt which is often the place where the mission of God can finally take off. It’s when we realize that our own efforts are not getting the job done. We look around and see a world in shambles. And it’s in that point of desperation that the mission of God can begin.

And so God says to Abraham, “Go.” Our God is constantly on the move and he wants his people to be on the move as well. And it’s his desire that **wherever** we go, we are about the mission of blessing the people and places that cross our path. We can not be on mission with God and stay put.

Not only are we to on mission wherever we go, everything we need to accomplish the mission comes from God. God said I will bless you and then you will bless others with that very blessing. What you need to be on mission with me comes from me. I’m not blessing you so can hoard it or just reflect on how good it feels to be blessed. No, he says you are “blessed to be a blessing.” However I have blessed you – you use that to bless others. You don’t have to manufacture anything, just bless others with all that I have blessed you.

From the very beginning, even as far back as Abraham, God’s plan for impacting the world has been a “blessing strategy.” God blessed Abraham, but the point of that blessing for Abraham and all of us who follow after him is to BE a blessing!

**New Heading**

There isn’t a better example of *going* than Jesus. Think about it. Jesus entire life was *going.* His very presence on this earth was an act of being sent. From heaven to earth, there wasn’t a single breath, not a single blink of his eyes, not a moment in his life in which he wasn’t *sent* by God.

You see in the way that Jesus lived out his mission. There isn’t a day where Jesus isn’t on mission. Not a moment where he’s not going. A powerful example of this is recorded in Luke’s Gospel. Take a look at how this story starts out. It may seem like an insignificant detail, but don’t miss it.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. **3**He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd.**4**So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

 – Luke 19:1

Jesus was “passing through” Jericho. He’s on the move headed somewhere else. Spending time with Zacchaeus wasn’t something he planned weeks in advance in his divine Jesus day-planner. No, the opportunity to engage with him just presented itself as Jesus was living his life. Keep this sentence until the end…And the result? Zacchaeus found his way back to God.

Jesus was willing to associate himself with a man that many hated, practically inviting himself to Zacchaeus’ house for a meal. This was no small matter in Jesus’ day. To share a meal with someone was an act of friendship. Jesus’ act of blessing was so moving to Zacchaeus that he immediately promised to give away essentially everything he owned. I love how Jesus responds.

Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

- Luke19:9-10

Jesus blessing over Zacchaeus is immediate. He doesn’t say *tomorrow* salvation has come. It’s not, when you get you’re life straightened out salvation has come, when the check clears with all this money you’re giving away salvation has come. No! *Today* salvation has come. The blessing that Jesus brings is for today.

Think about the magnitude of this blessing. This man Zacchaeus, a tax collector despised by his people because of the way he swindled them, is now a son of Abraham. The same “blessed to be a blessing” that was true of Abraham is now true of Zacchaeus.

This happened because Jesus lived out his mission every day, “to seek and save the lost.” It’s helping people find their way back to God. Soften this…How do we imitate him as Christ-followers? And it’s exactly what we’re sent to do as well.

**New Heading**

The same blessing that was declared to Abraham, and the same blessing that Jesus spoke over Zacchaeus as a son of Abraham, belongs to us as well. Paul’s letter to church in Galatia draws a straight line from Abraham to us.

Make sure it is clear… In Jesus we receive the continuation of the promise (not the exact same promise given to Abraham)

Understand, then, that those who have faith aside…”people who have put their faith in Jesus…” are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

- Galatians 3:7-9

We are blessed! Be careful here. Make sure it is because we are “in Christ” we are the continuation of this promise. The same promise of blessing for Abraham is a promise to us. But here’s what we can’t miss. We are blessed to be a blessing. This blessing was never meant for us to keep to ourselves. Jesus said that if we believed in him, streams of living water would flow from within us. Our lives aren’t meant to be buckets of blessing for us to contain and hold onto. Blessing is meant to flow. We’re not buckets, we’re rivers! So let it flow!

Blessing can flow through us, just as blessing flowed through Abraham, and just as it flowed from Jesus to Zacchaeus. Paul put it this way:

When anyone lives in Christ, the new creation has come. The old is gone! The new is here! All this is from God. He brought us back to himself through Christ’s death on the cross. And he has given us the task of bringing others back to him through Christ. God was bringing the world back to himself through Christ. He did not hold people’s sins against them. God has trusted us with the message that people may be brought back to him.

- 2 Corinthians 5:17-19

Think about what we get to tell people. How we get to bless. This message has been entrusted to us. God isn’t counting people’s sins against them! They can find their way back to God! It’s a message straight from heaven; a divine blessing that flows out of our lives and into the lives of others.

**Story: Blessed to Be a Blessing**

(Story of life change here. Perhaps each teaching pastor briefly shares their own story of finding their way back to God.)

I’m here today because someone was willing to bless me. I moved to a new school my seventh grade year carrying with me a lot of hurt and brokenness. The two years prior had been rough. Kids can be cruel, and at the time, I felt like all of that cruelty was focused on me. It felt like I was the butt of every joke and the punching bag of every bully at my school. I remember vividly telling my parents how much I hated people. Why would I ever want to be around people who didn’t want me? I always pictured myself alone, because it was the only time I felt safe.

Then someone came with a blessing bigger than his arms could possibly carry. Heaps and mounds of blessing that changed my life forever. There was no sermon, no spiritual songs. Just friendship. I found my way back to God because a fellow seventh grader named Ross decided to be my friend. I met Jesus through the blessing of his friendship. All these years later, we’re still best friends. And the blessing keeps flowing. No kidding. Our wives even delivered our firstborn children on the same day 30 minutes apart.

I could never have imagined how much things would change. Now my life is people everyday. I wouldn’t want it any other way. I was blessed because someone was a blessing to me. And now I get to be a blessing to others.

**How to Be a BLESSing**

Again I believe that most of us want to be on mission. I think most of us truly **hope** our friends, family, neighbors and co-workers will find their way back to God. The question is how do we stop **hoping** that people will find their way back to God and instead start **helping** people find their way back to God.

That is the focus of the next five weeks in this series. We are going to give you five simple practices that you can begin right away that will help you help your friends, family, neighbors and co-workers find their way back to God.

What is this resource? When you came in you were given a card with some lines to write down the names of people whose lives you would like God to touch. Think about “as you go” who do you come across? where are the places? So begin to think about the 4 or 5 people whom you would love for them to know the grace of God in Jesus.

I’m going to give you a quick overview of these practices. And while I do that I want you to write down the names of those 4-5 people. Then in the coming weeks we’re going to dig into each one of these practices a little deeper so you can stop just **hoping** and instead start **helping** them find their way back to God.

It’s probably not surprising that these practices spell out the word B.L.E.S.S.

Graphics on screen?

**Begin with Prayer**

The “B” if for Begin with Prayer. We believe that prayer is both how you *discover* your mission as well as how you *accomplish* it. If you’re not sure about the specific mission God has for you – where he wants you to go or to whom he wants you to go, you can begin with prayer. If you do know the person you want to reach, pray for that person. And if you know the place you want to impact, pray for that neighborhood, that community, or that group of people.

**Listen**

The “L” in BLESS is for Listen.Sadly, most Christians are known for talking more than listening. If we truly hope to impact the lives of people around us, then we must first get to know them. Any relationship starts with listening. We need to listen to their hopes, their dreams, and their challenges. Truly listening may be the kindest and most loving gift you can give someone. The “L” is for Listen.

**Eat**

This third practice is our personal favorite, and it’s something in which many of us are experts—eating! There is something about sharing a meal together that moves any relationship past acquaintance toward friendship—faster than just about anything else we can do. And there are few ways we can better bless the people around us than by sharing a meal together. The “E” in BLESS is “Eat.”

**Serve**

We are convinced that if you will begin with prayer, listen, and eat, there is a good chance that by then you will have discovered how you can best **serve** the person or place to which God has called you. As a matter of fact, they’ll likely tell you how you can best serve them. The first “S” in BLESS is for “Serve.”

Many of us are quick to jump to serving before we’ve really listened. Listening helps us discover how we can best come alongside someone and serve. The listening before the serving ensures that the serving is really about the person being served and not the person doing the serving.

**Story**

Our experience is that if you do the other *BLESS* practices – Begin with Prayer, Listen, Eat, and Serve, then there is a good chance you will have the opportunity to share your story. . . or that someone may ask you to tell them what makes you different. It is then that you can tell them your story of how Jesus changed your life. The second “S” in BLESS is “Story.”

(We could go back to the card now and ask them to be sure they have those names written down before we segue into the conclusion and communion).

**Conclusion/Communion**

Come back to “Helping/Hoping” in conclusion.

Think back to Zacchaeus with me for a moment. Here’s a guy who had been far from God, living a life of greed on the backs of the people around him. He’s despised and alone. But now this man who had once been at war with God has Jesus sitting at his table dining with him! That doesn’t sound much different from what we’re experiencing right now. Maybe you’ve been at war with God, but please know this. He’s not far from you. He’s sitting right here at the table with us just like he sat with Zacchaeus. We’re not despised. We are blessed.

We are blessed to be a blessing. But the question is this: Who isn’t sitting at this table today that you need to be sent to? Let’s remember Jesus sacrifice as we take the bread and cup and commit ourselves to live a life of BLESSing those around us.